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KNOWLEDGE AN AMUSEMENT



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YOU must take human beings as you find them, not criticising or mourning, but finding some way to help. The intelligent French Government knew what to do with savages and half-civilized Arabs included in its African dominions. The French did not say to them: "You are foolish to believe in your magicians, they are cheats and swindlers, come with us and attend the wonderful lectures at the Sorbonne."

Nothing of that sort, the French are too wise. They said to the inhabitants of their colonies, "You have most superior magicians, we have some also. Let us see which are abler."

From the boulevard, where he did his tricks to amuse Parisians, Robert Houdin, magician, was sent across the Mediterranean to Africa. With a great crowd gathered, he watched the tricks of the native so-called "magicians." Then he asked those magicians to try something with him.

He invited them to lift a small trunk with metal handles. Several of them pulled with all their might, but could not lift it. It was held to the ground by a strong electric magnet.

When they had struggled and tried in vain, Houdin's assistant cut off the current while Houdin lifted the trunk with one finger. The natives thought less of their own magicians at once.

Then Houdin said, "I will stand ten feet away and when I tell the trunk to let you lift it, you will be able to lift it." He did as he said. When he spoke the current was cut off and the tugging magicians lifted the trunk so rapidly that they fell over backwards. That also injured the local talent.

Next he said, "Now take hold of the handles, and when I give the word you will not be able to let go." When he gave the word a powerful electric current was turned into the handles, and the magicians unable to let go, wriggled in agony and fright like worms on a hook, the electricity running through their bodies. That settled the local magicians. The inhabitants of the French colonies decided that France and the French Government were what they wanted, since the French brand of magician was so much abler than their own.

You can readily understand that after having discredited the local magicians and displayed tricks that they never dreamed of, it was easy to interest intelligent Arabs in the truth, by explaining to them how easily electricity worked, and enabling them to do for themselves the wonderful things that they had just seen Robert Houdin do.

Very wisely the French made plain truth and knowledge of electricity more INTERESTING than the lying tricks of the magicians.

That is the way friends of truth and knowledge should work everywhere.

Do not growl because the dog-faced man, the

Knowledge and the truth are free for those that will seek them. Admission is charged at every side show. Between the truth and the freak there is no real competition as Mr. McCay's cartoon here shows you.

turtle boy or the fat lady draw crowds that never visit the great libraries.

Make Truth and Knowledge more interesting than the man that eats snakes alive, that's your problem.

When the barker for the turtle boy begins his speech, "Mind of a Socrates, body of a tortoise," listen patiently. After the crowd has looked at the dull, half idiotic and deformed creature, reach them if you can with extracts from the mind of the REAL Socrates.

Begin by saying that he was one of the most courageous men that ever lived, that he took poison and died of it to set a good example, rather than violate the law and escape when he could have done so.

It is just as easy, if you go about it in the right way, to interest a man in Socrates himself as in the turtle boy supposed to have "the mind of a Socrates."

If a boy or young man is interested in Barnum's "What Is It," do not weep over his degradation or lack of intellect. Say to him, "Now that you have looked at the idiot dressed up in fur, I will tell you of some other 'What Is It.' What is it that makes it possible for you to balance yourself, running swiftly on two legs? It is an ingenious little mechanism in your ear, containing a few drops of oil that tells your brain what the spirit level tells the carpenter. Those drops tell the nerves whether you are balanced or not. Destroy that little machine, and you cannot keep your balance."

"What is it that keeps your blood always at the same temperature, about 98 degrees, whether you are in the stoke room of a steamer with the temperature at one hundred and fifty, or at the North Pole with the thermometer 100 degrees below freezing?"

If you can express your thought in simple language, you can divert the interest of any human being from the dog-faced man to the glands, mysterious, not yet understood, in his own body. You can interest him in the thyroid gland, that, fed to an idiot, will restore him to a normal mental state.

You can interest him in glands that control the heat of the body and the blood supply. The "suprarenal" gland, near the kidneys, reduced to a powder and applied to a wound, will immediately stop the flow of blood. That apparent miracle will interest any one.

To the crowd in front of a fat lady you can explain that she is suffering from lack of power to elimi-

The side shows of life are crowded, the temples of knowledge and truth are deserted.

The situation is not to be remedied by criticism or preaching, but by MAKING TRUTH AS INTERESTING AS THE TATTOOED MAN.

nate fat. The crowd will become more interested in the nature of her disease than in all the wealth of her fatness.

Say to the little boy looking at the snake charmer, "If the snake ate you, your body would be turned into snake tissue, and snake brain, and YOUR FLESH would help the snake to do a snake's THINKING."

"Whereas if YOU ate the SNAKE, its body would be turned into blood, flesh and thinking power for you, and what, just before, was only a snake, would be used in building up YOUR human thought."

The ordinary American boy would be more interested in knowing that if he ate a snake he could use it to think with, than in seeing the lady wrap the snake around her neck.

But if you say to him, "Come with me to the library," he will say naturally, "No, I'd rather see the snake charmer."

Take human beings as they ARE, find out what interests them, then, with your intelligence, transfer their interest gently from the tattooed man, the prize fighter, the baseball expert, to something worth while, by dealing in things that interest them.

For instance, there are probably twenty million full grown men in the United States profoundly interested in the fact that a person called "Babe" Ruth can take a club and knock a baseball so far that all the men on the bases come safely "home" before the ball can be caught and returned.

You are disgusted, perhaps, that twenty million men should be interested in "Babe" Ruth's club, and not twenty thousand interested in a scientific book. But you must remember that for five hundred thousand years the most important thing to human beings was the CLUB, and the skill with which it was used. The man who knew how to use a club, knew also how to protect his family, how to save his wife and his children from the neighbor or the bear across the valley.

Where clubs have been known and respected for five hundred thousand years, and books have been known for only two or three thousand years, you must expect the club to dominate.

But even "Babe" Ruth and his baseball club can be made useful in turning the mind of the young people toward interesting truth.

Tell them to notice HOW "Babe" Ruth HOLDS his baseball bat, as compared with other players. He does not hold it in the ordinary way, with both hands

together and the knob end of the club sticking out beyond his left hand. The big round knob end of the club he holds grasped inside the palm of his huge left hand. The right hand is close against it. Thus, as he stands in the "batter's box" he adds two inches or more to the length of his club, and thus, by the laws of LEVERAGE, he adds tremendously to the force of his blow.

Explain to your little boy that if "Babe" Ruth had strength to use a club twenty feet long, he could knock the baseball a mile or more.

Tell him that holding his club as he does, with the knob at the end inside his fist, he gains length and LEVERAGE. And that helps to account for his home runs.

Then lead him gently 2,300 years back to Archimedes, who knew and discovered so much about the mechanical sciences that scarcely anything new was discovered for more than a thousand years after he died. Tell how he said truthfully that he would move the world if he had a lever long enough and a place to stand; tell about the warlike engines that he invented, how he was supposed to set fire to enemy ships by use of burning glasses and the sun's rays.

Then say to the young man: "You have got to hold a burning glass STILL over ONE spot in order to make it work. If you keep moving the glass around it will not set fire to anything."

"YOUR BRAIN is like a burning glass, you must keep it still, working on one spot for sufficient time, if you want to get anything done. Keep moving your brain around all the time and it won't accomplish anything."

Tell your small boy how Archimedes, in his bathtub, suddenly discovered how he could tell King Hieron to what extent base metal had been mixed with the gold in his crown, how he got so excited he jumped out of the bathtub and ran down the street crying: "Heureka," meaning, "I have found it."

You won't find it hard to get your small boy's mind away from "Babe" Ruth's home run by transferring it to Archimedes' famous run down the street. That run will be remembered when all the "Babe's" great "homers" are forgotten.

Don't complain that crowds are lacking in the churches. Make the churches as interesting as the places to which the crowds go on Sunday. Beecher did it. Others can do it. Try church movies, if necessary. Beecher sold a slave girl at auction from his pulpit.

If you complain that there are too many visiting the side show and too few visiting the library, make the library more interesting than the side show. It CAN be done.

What this world needs is KNOWLEDGE MADE EASY, PLEASANT AND EXCITING.

Nothing is more stupid than the old-fashioned idea that knowledge must be hard and painful, medicine unpleasant to the taste, and learning watered with the tears of childhood.

Truth and knowledge are simple, beautiful and easy, if teachers will only make them so.